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THOMAS PAINE

BY
ELBERT HUBBARD



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THOMAS PAINE



THOMAS PAINE was the greatest writer of his day. He was one of the foremost patriots of his time, and America owes him a

great debt of gratitude and devotion.

¶ While to me Paine's chief claim to immortality lies in his efforts to free us from the shackles of religious and political superstition, yet in looking over what he achieved or proposed, I find that he is entitled to the gratitude

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of *all* mankind in that he first of all men proposed American Independence ; suggested the Federal Union of States ; proposed the abolition of negro slavery ; suggested protection for dumb animals ; proposed arbitration and international peace ; advocated justice to women ; pointed out the reality of human brotherhood ; suggested international copyright ; proposed the education of children of the poor at public expense ; suggested a great republic of all the nations of the world ; and urged the purchase of the great Louisiana Territory.

But for more than a century the world ignored this brilliant mind or else

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heaped obloquy on his name. It looks now, though, as if the name of Thomas Paine will soon occupy that niche in the world's Temple of Fame where it properly belongs. The Thomas Paine National Historical Association, which was organized several years ago in New York City, has done splendid work in bringing to Paine a just measure of recognition.

It no longer suffices to dismiss him as a "filthy little atheist." We now recognize such persiflage as pure piffle, indicative of its muddy source. Thinkers everywhere are proclaiming Thomas Paine the great statesman, philosopher and patriot. In the cele-

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bration at the Paine Monument in New Rochelle last Memorial Day, among the speakers on the program I noted these: Doctor Henry Neumann, Leader of the Society for Ethical Culture; Henry W. Wilbur, Secretary of the Religious Society of Friends; Doctor Sait, of Columbia University; and the Reverend Doctor Wiers, of Montclair, New Jersey • Surely light is breaking in the East!

THE genius of Paine was a flower that blossomed slowly. But life is a sequence, and the man who does great work has been in training for it. There is nothing like keeping in con-

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dition ; one does not know when he is going to be called upon. Prepared people do not have to hunt for a position—the position hunts for them. Paine knew more about what he was getting ready for than did Benjamin Franklin, when, at twenty, he studied French evenings and dived deep into history ❧ ❧

The humble origin of Paine and his Quaker ancestry were most helpful factors in his career. Only a working man who had tasted hardship could sympathize with the overtaxed and oppressed ❧ ❧

Paine's schooling was slight ; but his parents, though poor, were thinking

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people, for nothing sharpens the wits of men, preventing fatty degeneration of the cerebrum, like persecution. In this respect the Jews and the Quakers have been greatly blessed and benefited.

Very early in life Paine acquired the study habit. And for the youth who has the study habit no pedagogic tears need be shed. There were debating clubs at coffeehouses, where great themes were discussed ; and our young weaver began his career by defending the Quakers. He acquired considerable local reputation as a weaver of thoughts upon the warp and woof of words. Occasionally he occupied the pulpit in Dissenting chapels.

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These were great times in England—the air was all athrob with thought and feeling. A great tidal wave of unrest swept the land. It was an epoch of growth second only in history to the Italian Renaissance. The two Wesleys were attacking the Church and calling upon men to methodize their lives and eliminate folly ; Gibbon was writing his *Decline and Fall* ; Burke, in the House of Commons, was polishing his brogue ; Boswell was busy blithering about a book concerning a man ; Captain Cook was sailing the seas finding continents ; the two Pitts and Charles Fox were giving the King unpalatable advice ;

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Horace Walpole was setting up his private press at Strawberry Hill; the Herschels—brother and sister—were sweeping the heavens for comets; Reynolds, West, Lawrence, Romney and Gainsborough were founding the first school of British art; and David Hume, the Scotchman, was putting forth arguments irrefutable.

And into this seething discontent came Thomas Paine, the weaver, reading, studying, thinking, talking, with nothing to lose but his reputation. At a coffeehouse in London Paine met that other great thinker, Franklin. They became fast friends. Franklin recognized the genius of Paine and

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urged him to come to America, the land of opportunity, a country where thinkers were needed. He gave Paine letters of introduction and recommendation, and November Thirtieth, Seventeen Hundred Seventy-four, Paine landed in the "new world."

Paine was a writing man; the very first American writing man—and I am humiliated when I have to acknowledge that we had to get him from England. He was the first man who ever wrote these words, "The American Nation," and also these, "The United States of America."

Paine is the first American writer who had a literary style, and we have not

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had so many since but that you may count them on the fingers of one hand.

Note this sample of antithesis :

“ There are but two natural sources of wealth—the earth and the ocean—and to lose the right to either, in our situation, is to put the other up for sale.”

During Seventeen Hundred Seventy-five Paine edited the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and in its pages appeared several notable essays from his pen, among them his pleas for the abolition of slavery, for justice to women, for the suppression of dueling.

His writings from the first commanded profound attention. During

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the latter half of his first year in America he wrote *Common Sense*, that precious pamphlet that awakened the colonists to a realization of their best interests, separation from their “mother-country”—independence.

Common Sense was published early in January of the following year. It had an enormous sale and was directly responsible for the Declaration of Independence six months later and the successful revolution that followed. Paine took no financial profits from his work, but gave all to the revolutionary cause. The pamphlet was published anonymously—“Written by an Englishman.”

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In France John Adams was accused of writing *Common Sense*. He stoutly denied it, there being several allusions in it stronger than he cared to stand sponsor for.

In England Franklin was accused of being the author, and he neither denied nor admitted it. But when a lady reproached him for having used the fine alliterative phrase, applied to the King, "That Royal British Brute," he smiled and said, blandly, "Madame, I would never have been as disrespectful to the brute creation as that."

Common Sense struck the keynote of popular feeling, and the

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accusation of " treason," hurled at it from many sources, only served to advertise it. It supplied the common people with reasons and gave statesmen arguments. The Legislature of Pennsylvania voted Paine an honorarium of three thousand dollars, and the University of Pennsylvania awarded him the degree of " Master of Arts," in recognition of eminent services to literature and human rights. John Quincy Adams said, " Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, crystallized public opinion and was the first factor in bringing about the Revolution." ☛ ☛

Reverend Theodore Parker once said :

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“Every living man in America in Seventeen Hundred Seventy-six who could read, read *Common Sense*, by Thomas Paine. If he were a Tory he read it, at least a little, just to find out for himself how atrocious it was; and if he was a Whig he read it all to find the reasons why he was one. This book was the arsenal to which colonists went for their mental weapons.”

¶ When independence was declared Paine enlisted as a private, but was soon made aide-de-camp to General Greene. He was an intrepid and effective soldier and took an active part in various battles.

In December, Seventeen Hundred

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Seventy-six, he published his second book, *The Crisis*, the first words of which have gone into the electrotpe of human speech: "These are the times that try men's souls." The intent of *The Crisis* was to infuse courage into the sinking spirits of the soldiers. Washington ordered the book to be read at the head of every regiment, and it was so done. On June Eighth, Seventeen Hundred Eighty, Paine started a subscription-list, and headed it with five hundred dollars, all the money he had, to feed Washington's starving army. The total sum subscribed was a little over one million five hundred thousand dollars. This

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sum averted disaster until the loan was secured from France.

Rights of Man was Paine's third great work. *Age of Reason* was the last volume given to the world by this great thinker.

EVERY American should acquaint himself with the career of Thomas Paine, patriot, philosopher, statesman, liberator and humanitarian. Had Paine given to the world nothing more than that matchless phrase which he adopted as his motto, "The world is my country; to do good is my religion," I should still feel that he was indeed entitled to a supernal position

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in the galleries of Fame. The breadth of Paine's soul may be measured in his splendid retort when Franklin remarked, "Where liberty is, there is my home." Paine replied, "Where liberty is *not*, there is *my* home." ♣ Liberty was Paine's keynote. As early as Seventeen Hundred Seventy-five, eighty-eight years before Lincoln's emancipation proclamation, Paine published an eloquent appeal in behalf of the negro slave. He advocated the immediate abolishment of the system of human bondage. Paine also wrote in favor of universal peace and an end to all war and militarism. Had Paine's wise counsel been heeded

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and slavery abolished at the birth of the American republic, the Civil War, with its frightful toll of more than a half-million lives sacrificed, had been averted. Had the world heeded Paine's advice, the great European war of Nineteen Hundred Fourteen and all other wars since Paine's time had never taken place.

Among Paine's writings on the subject of war occurs this fine passage :

“ When we consider the calamities of war and the miseries it inflicts upon the human species, the thousands and tens of thousands, of every age and sex, who are rendered wretched by the event, surely there is something

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in the heart of man that calls upon him to think! Surely there is some tender chord, tuned by the hand of the Creator, that still struggles to emit in the hearing of the soul a note of sorrowing sympathy.

“ Let it then be heard and let man learn to feel that the true greatness of a nation is founded on principles of humanity, and not on conquest ☛

“ War involves in its progress such a train of unforeseen and unsusposed circumstances, such a combination of foreign matters, that no human wisdom can calculate the end. It has but one thing certain, and that is to increase taxes.

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“ I defend the cause of the poor, of the manufacturer, of the tradesman, of the farmer, and of all those on whom the real burden of taxes falls—but, above all, I defend the cause of women and children—of all humanity.” ♣ ♣

EASE, fluidity, grace, imagination, energy, earnestness, mark Paine's work. No wonder is it that Franklin said, “ Others can rule, many can fight, but only Paine can write for us the English tongue.” And Jefferson, himself a great writer, was constantly, for many years, sending to Paine manuscript for criticism

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and correction. In one letter to Paine, Jefferson adds this postscript, " You must not be too much elated and set up when I tell you my belief that you are the only writer in America who can write better than your obliged and obedient servant—Thomas Jefferson."

¶ Paine published in England in Seventeen Hundred Ninety-one and Two *Rights of Man*, Parts One and Two, the greatest revolutionary political treatise ever written. Paine was outlawed by the government of that day, and was also burnt in effigy for his pains. The thinking men of England now revere the memory of Thomas Paine for his great work in

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the nation's behalf. The most important of the many reforms England has undertaken in the century that has elapsed since it outlawed Paine have been brought about by Paine's masterly work.

In Seventeen Hundred Ninety-four Paine published his *Age of Reason*, considered by many persons to be the most vital of all Paine's works. Upon this theological treatise is founded all modern biblical criticism. The clergy nowadays frequently quote this book, but seldom indeed do they credit the source of their quotations.

¶ For writing *The Age of Reason*, Paine, a deeply religious man, but a

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thinker who rejected the so-called religion that was popular, was branded an atheist. Only in recent years, and very largely through the work of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association, has the world come to an understanding and appreciation of Paine ☛ ☛

THERE have been many prevarications concerning Paine by press and pulpit and those who profess a life of love, meekness and humility. But we should remember that all this vilification is really the tribute that mediocrity pays genius. To escape censure one only has to move with

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the mob, think with the mob, do nothing that the mob does not do—then you are safe. The saviors of the world have usually been crucified between thieves, despised, forsaken, spat upon, rejected of men. Socrates poisoned, Aristides ostracized, Aristotle fleeing for his life, Jesus crucified, Paul beheaded, Peter crucified head downward, Savonarola martyred, Spinoza hunted, tracked and cursed, and an order issued that no man should speak to him nor supply him food or shelter, Bruno burned, Galileo imprisoned, Huss, Wyclif, Latimer and Tyndale used for kindling—all this in the name of religion, institu-

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tional religion, the one thing that has caused more misery, heartache, bloodshed, war, than all other causes combined ☛ ☛

Men who know history and humanity and have reasonably open minds are not surprised at the treatment visited upon Paine by the country he had so much benefited.

Paine got off easy ; he lived his life, and expressed himself freely to the last. Men who discover continents are destined to die in chains. That is the price they pay for sailing on, and on, and on, and on.

The pen of Paine made the sword of Washington possible. And as Paine's

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book, *Common Sense*, broke the power of Great Britain in America, and *The Rights of Man* gave free speech and a free press to England, so did *The Age of Reason* give pause to the juggernaut of orthodoxy. Paine blazed the way and made it possible for men to preach the sweet reasonableness of reason. He was the pioneer in a jungle of superstition ♣

THE Thomas Paine National Historical Association is doing a great and necessary work in spreading the light about Thomas Paine. All lovers of Thomas Paine and of Liberty would do well to write to

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W. H. Harvey, 62 Vesey Street, New York City, asking him for literature regarding the work and objects of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association. And having done so, you will thank me for having put you wise to a very great and worthy undertaking.



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A CORDIAL invitation is extended to all persons interested in Thomas Paine and his great labors for the benefit of humanity to become members of the Thomas Paine National Historical Association, an organization incorporated under the laws of the State of New York for the purpose of increasing the public's knowledge and appreciation of Paine and his works. The Association has opened a permanent Thomas Paine National Museum at the Paine house in New Rochelle on the farm that was presented to Paine by the State of New York in recognition of his services before and during the Revolutionary War. Meetings are

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held at which Paine and his works are discussed and dinners are given upon the anniversaries of Paine's birth. Every person who is interested in the objects of this Association should at once send in his (or her) name for enrollment. There are no initiation fees, and the dues are only one dollar a year. Names, accompanied by remittance, should be addressed to the Treasurer, W. H. Harvey, Sixty-two Vesey Street, New York.



***E**NGLAND, France and America were made more noble, more intelligent, more civilized, by the work Thomas Paine did for each country and for all countries. No nation of the world has forgotten Paine, and certainly no religious sect has. He wrote of the rights of man when men believed that only gods had rights. At best, men had only privileges. Today we dare to affirm that women as well as men have rights. Paine was the pioneer of this thought. The "Rights of Man" will never die so long as men have rights.*

—ALICE HUBBARD.





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